

Dominika Tihanyi  
Theses of DLA Dissertation

**THE ROLE OF CREATIVE STRATEGIES AND PUBLIC ART IN THE  
COURSE OF URBAN REHABILITATION**

Supervisor: János Mónus

Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Doctor School  
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## **Problem statement and rational**

In the past 20 years – since the change in the political system – similar social, cultural and urban changes have been undergoing in Hungary to that of the ones that have taken place during the past century in the Western world. The impact of globalisation, investment-oriented urbanisation, the development of technology and the rise of consumer society can clearly be seen in the isolation between people especially in the urban situation. In this environment the lack of communication and the loss over control of happenings lead to homogenization and unconcern, while elsewhere in contrast to this, uniqueness and cooperation are of more and more value; just as design based on local values and demand in our globalized world. The question arises: what are the tools that advocate change in this situation? Moreover how and with what means can urban development, architecture and public art contribute to the much needed changes to arouse.

## **Aims and objectives of the research**

The theoretical research aims to find answers to the questions above. It starts out from analyzing the urban context of social and cultural aspects of isolation and then examines the possible ways to develop platforms that generate dialogue and cooperation. The aim of the research is to examine how urban design, public art and creative strategies help communicational platforms that help in reconstructing social and environmental bonds/relations to rise. With a set of examples it aims to show how democratic open spaces can be constructed in our centralised world that tightens the space of relations and creates the time and space for cooperation to arise. It is argued that art strategies implemented as part of urban rehabilitation are able to create platforms for communication that will help the social aspects of rehabilitation to arise and allow the rehabilitation process to become more flexible. Focusing on the Hungarian situation the dissertation aims to present how durational art strategies can be implemented as part of urban rehabilitation hence the methodology of cultural master planning is introduced.

## **Structure of the discussion**

The first part of the dissertation gives the theoretical background of the masterpiece. The first chapter deals with the problem of isolation, followed by the discussion of the importance of social and environmental aspects of urban rehabilitation. Urban development and design strategies that help attend problems deriving from isolation (e.g. the lack of cooperation between people as the main problem stated

by the dissertation) are introduced, which foresee a necessary paradigm shift in urban development by the twenty-first century. In the second chapter the flare of the role of public art is discussed. Connection is drawn between the evolution of public space design and public art in the context that both share the appearance of social engagement opposed to traditional roles of representation and self-expression. These first two chapters aim to present that a parallel can be drawn between the changing roles of urban development/rehabilitation, urban design and public art in the social context of creating liveable cities. Thus the reasons and the means of implementation of public art interventions in the process of urban rehabilitation are argued. In the third chapter durational approaches are introduced as creative art strategies that help in reconstructing social relations and help the process of place making. Finally, the method of cultural master planning is advocated as means to help create a framework for a chain of public art elements to be implemented as integral part of the rehabilitation process that helps social and physical aspects of rehabilitation and sustainability to arise.

## **Structure of the masterpiece**

The masterpiece consists of two counterparts: the Interactive Mapping Project and the chain of public art interventions developed on the site of the Palotanegyed in the 8<sup>th</sup> district in Budapest. Firstly, the Interactive Mapping Project is presented as a playful tool for urban research, which aims to exemplify that an interactive public art intervention is able to create and model social and inclusive spaces in urban settings where it would seem impossible, and that a project as such can be of help in gathering useful information in connection with urban rehabilitation. Secondly, the chain of public art interventions is presented, which is developed in strong connection with the aims of the rehabilitation within the cultural master plan of the Palotanegyed. It is devised upon and presented as the realisation of the methodology introduced in the theoretical research. It aims to illustrate that opposed to developing unattached public art interventions in different parts of the city it is more beneficial to create a chain of interconnected public art actions in a specific site that on the whole act as acupuncture points that activate the specific city part for a long duration of time. The 12 interventions developed in the duration of 4 years are set up in strong connection to the social-economical and environmental aims of the rehabilitation. Their aim is to turn the site of the Palotanegyed into an ever evolving, interactive gallery, enhancing local economy and culture, guaranteeing sustainable development. Accordingly actions become tools for modelling different space usages, drawing attention to the communal role of public spaces. The actions create the possibility for new social connections to develop, in a social setting where networking is hard to develop. The actions also act as communicational surfaces through which local knowledge can be devised that can be incorporated in future plans and designs of the rehabilitation.

## Findings

### 1. The need of cooperation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The development of cities and technology, the rise of automobile culture and decentralization create and intensify accelerated lifestyles which deepen isolation, weaken social relations and destruct cooperation between people that e.g. cause the manifestation of public spaces to become *non-spaces*. In this situation such interventions that promote cooperation, interaction and participation, through which strong local community identity can be developed, play an ever important role in societies of today. Considering urban life these interventions also play an active part in creating lively and liveable cities and an open society.

### 2. Paradigm shift in urbanism

Similarly to that of the industrial age in the opening years of the twenty-first century a paradigm shift can be seen in the re-conception of urbanism, where cities are starting to be conceived of a set of complex systems that add up to an organic whole. In urban development and rehabilitation long term strategic approach and interconnected economical-ecological-social thinking is advocated, where social and cultural aspects are taken into consideration, which is deeply connected with the creation of 'good' (responsive, meaningful and democratic) public spaces, as common good. It is recognized that the renewal of public spaces affects cities in both social and economic sense thus like a century ago public space is perceived as a constellation of social relations. Hence public spaces act as arenas of local community revitalization and participative local democracy, become catalysts of urban renewal and the fulcrum of social and economic well-being.

### 3. The flare of the role of public art: the rise of socially engaged public art

Akin to rehabilitation strategies and to public space design changes in the role of public artworks can clearly be identified since the 1960s, when a new form of public art, socially engaged public art has started to arise. Prevalent by the 1980s in the new genre of public art social-cultural aspects come to front opposed to the traditional roles of representation and self expression. Socially engaged public engages people in the process of creation, opens up dialogue, models possible universes and creates experimental, perceptive, critical and participatory models. It plays an active role in the representation of the silent figures of society and takes active part in social process and community building. From the

urban aspect it can be seen that projects which advocate social process by creating cultural activities can be effective tools in place-making: by creating meanings, uses and forms.

#### **4. Architecture as a social-public/civic art form**

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century socially engaged public art as an act of the 'reconstruction of life' becomes apparent in the urban context, and the importance of this phenomenon is also recognized by architects. In the past decade it has become typical that mixed groups of artists and architects develop interventions that aim to substantiate design through enabling local knowledge to arise and understand local values and localized demands and help formulate and model ideas for possible future activities through engaging local residents in the actions. The greatest value of these creative actions can be seen in their overall durational approach – the time spent in one space – where architects and artists just like locals take part in the process as civilians, through which they also become active participants of the process. This new approach can be conceived as 'civic art', one that helps participatory citizenship to arise, for people to take action in their lives.

#### **5. Presence – Embeddedness – Durational approach as working method**

Long term presence guarantees the embeddedness of locals, artists and the developed work, which is an important factor in creating embedded places. Though continuous presence the interventions and the people taking part in the actions become an organic part of the life of a place and inspire change authentically. Continuous artistic/architectural presence gives time and space for cognition: to learn about a place and its' dwellers and gives a chance for people to become part of a long term process; hence gives base to participatory design and for local networks to develop. Creative interventions that are developed as part of a durational working method strongly contribute to changing and developing future perspectives of a community. As a supplement to urban rehabilitation the approach plays an important role in exploring local identity and creating socially inclusive spaces, hence gives base to social sustainability.

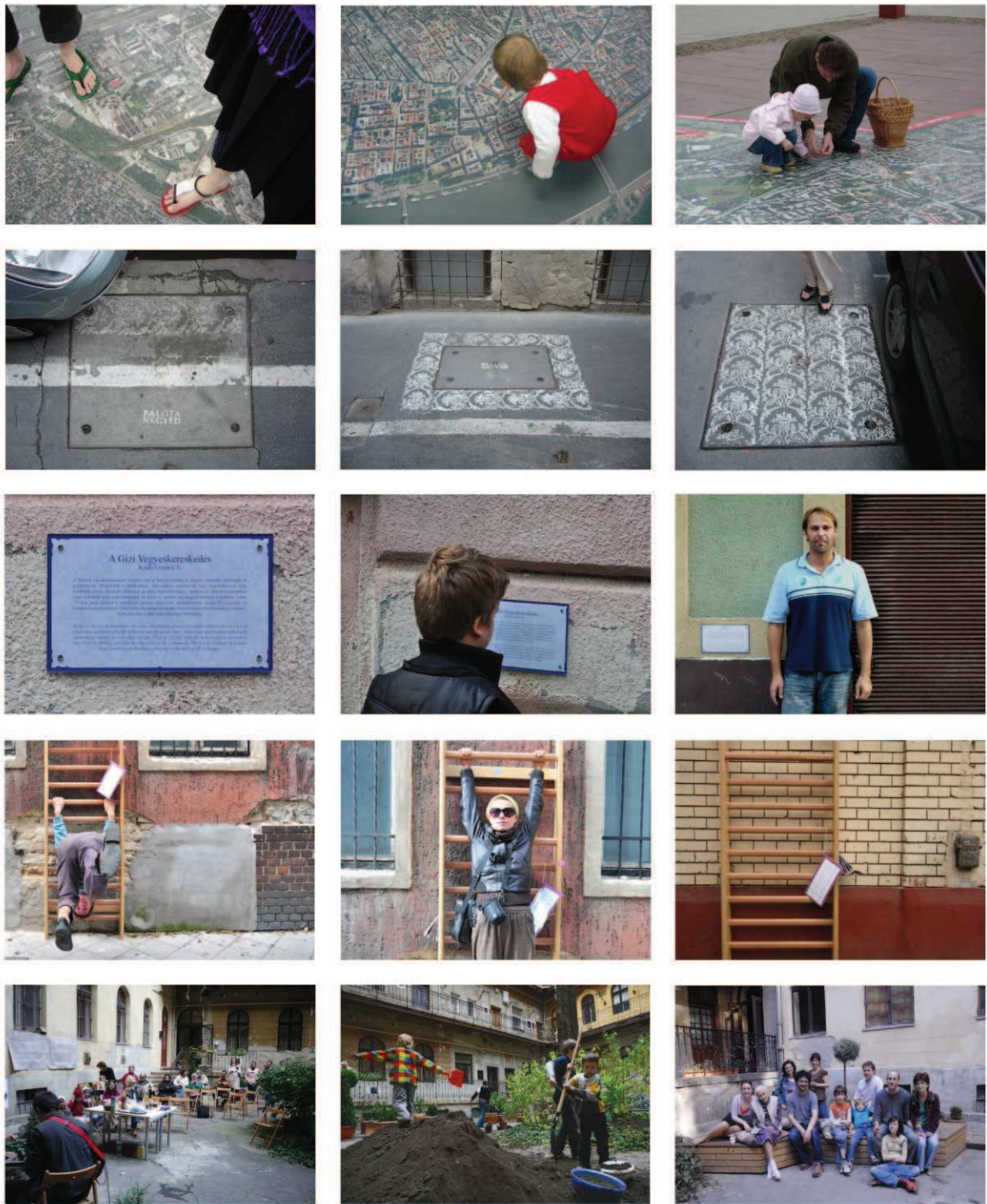
## **6. Pre-rehabilitation as a durational art strategy**

Pre-rehabilitation as a durational art strategy aims to enable rehabilitation process to become a flexible and dynamic one that is capable to change and adapt with time. In this context the 'chain of public art events' – concentrated on a specific site, act as acupuncture needles constantly activating the locals and the site – become an active, integral part of the regeneration process, helping social and physical aspects of the rehabilitation to rise, that will initiate a meaningful engagement between people and space. Through constant feedback the strategy creates time and space of inner renewal that rehabilitation processes alone cannot possess. The durational approach of the strategy also enables experimental research work to be done in order to explore locality and incorporate local knowledge. Through the rise of dialogue that is generated between the people within the process will also become an active, integral part of the regeneration process that will initiate a meaningful engagement between people and space and help social and physical aspects of the rehabilitation to rise. The essence of the strategy lies in its' durational approach: to be present in one well defined place for a long period of time. The idea of pre-rehabilitation suggests that with the means of the chain of public art events constantly activating the site local identity can be developed as a base for rehabilitation process and sustainability.

## **7. Cultural master planning – an effective help in rehabilitation processes**

Cultural master planning is the methodology that provides framework to the strategic concept of pre-rehabilitation. The methodology provides a framework for the systematic build-up, the detailed phasing of public artworks and cultural events to be set up during the process of the regeneration to help the democratisation of urban public space design. It also helps in exploring local values and potentials and guaranties the meaningful integration of public art elements thus local creativity and knowledge in the process of rehabilitation, which enables needs and feelings to arise during the process. Cultural master-planning is a learning process, through which future possibilities and cultural values can be mapped, discussed and integrated into everyday life. As an organic part of the rehabilitation process it affects the futures of communities in describing culturally embedded aims and helps new common goals to develop. Consequently it helps in creating an open and a culturally richer and socially embedded environment to rise.





Pieces of the masterwork: The Interactive Mapping Project / The elements of the chain of public art interventions developed on the site of the Palotanegyed: Asphalt painting project to mark out the site of the Palotanegyed / Living Gallery project / Urban P.E. / Inner courtyard revival project